

45
**The certain Futurity of Free
Actions no Contradiction:**

O R,
G O D 's Foreknowledge
O F
All E V E N T S
Not Inconsistent with
H U M A N L I B E R T Y.

A LETTER to a FRIEND :

Occasion'd by a late Pamphlet, Entitled,
*The Free Agency of Accountable Crea-
tures Examined.*



L O N D O N,

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The certain Futurity of Free Actions no Contradiction, &c.

June 30, 1733.

Dear SIR.

I Have read over your Friend's late Pamphlet, entitled [*The free Agency of Accountable Creatures, &c.*] The main Point wherein I differ from him, is, *The certain Futurity of free Actions*; which is indeed the main Point of Controversy between him and his Opponents.

I must own, Mr. F. hath set the Objections in as strong a Light, and hath said as much to puzzle the Cause, as any I remember to have met with upon the Subject. But I persuade myself, that notwithstanding all he hath said, the Matter may be set in a clear Light: I mean only, that the certain Futurity of free Actions may be clear'd from a Contradiction; and, consequently, a Foreknowledge of them be maintained without intrenching upon the Liberty of the Agent; not taking upon me to shew how these free Actions are foreseen.

You know very well that I am no Enemy to free Enquiry: nor do I expect, as the learned Dr. Waterland seems to do, (for I find Mr. F. quotes him as on his Side in the Argument, tho not in the Conclusion) that a Man should believe what appears to him to be a Contradiction. I should not take it well of any Man who should require this of me; because I should be afraid he had a Design upon me, to make me believe any thing he shou'd have a mind to put upon me: which I shou'd think he need not scruple to attempt, when he had once brought me to this; to believe a thing to be true, while at the same time it appears to me to be a Contradiction: or rather, would not this be the Way to make me believe nothing? It seems to me naturally to tend to an absolute, universal Scepticism. But this by the way. To come now to the Matter before us.

Mr. F's Position seems to me to be attended with some Consequences of very great Importance, which, I believe, Mr. F. as well as myself, would be very loth to grant; and, for this Reason, I am the more concern'd to enquire into the Force of his Arguments.

I will not insist on the *lessening the Perfection of the Divine Knowledge*, according to the Notion which Mankind have generally entertained of it, as extending to all future Events. And surely it must be own'd, that such a Compass of Knowledge is, in itself consider'd, vastly superior to the being gradually inform'd of Things innumerable by a Succession of Events. Hath not the Man who knows at this Instant all the Eclipses

Eclipses that will be for a hundred, or a thousand Years to come ; who knows distinctly the Times, the Extent, the Duration of each, &c. hath not this Man, I say, a greater degree of Knowledge than I have, who know not when any one Eclipse will happen ? Or will any one make a Scruple of saying, his Knowledge is *increased*, when he sees a multitude of Things come to pass, which were altogether uncertain to him before ? In such Cases, I shou'd think there could be no Dispute. And therefore, tho' it must be acknowledged, that it is no real Imperfection not to know beforehand such Events as in the nature of things could not possibly be known beforehand ; any more than it is a Defect of Power not to be able to do what is in its own Nature absolutely beyond the Reach of all Power : yet, as every Man clearly perceives that such Knowledge as we have described, supposing it possible, is a higher Perfection than the Want of it ; I am naturally led to ascribe it to God, till I am convinced that it is an Inconsistency.

But there are Consequences, in which we are more immediately concerned. If, as Mr. F. asserts, " No free Action can be certainly future ; " what signifies our having *the Promise, yea and the Oath of God, those two immutable things* (as the Scripture calls them) *in which it is impossible for God to lie* ? Is not God's keeping his Word a free Action ? By giving his Word, did he destroy that physical Power he was before possess'd of ? or is that Power of not doing the thing, which he had before he gave the Promise, since annihilated ? I always thought Faithfulness a moral Perfection in God, as well as in Man ; and that for this, as well

as for his Goodness in Creating, &c. he is worthy to be praised.

But farther, if Mr. F's Position be right, I don't see how any thing can be said to be future but the Existence of God: concerning whom, because of the absolute Necessity of his Nature, it may be said indeed, *He is, and was, and is to come*; but as to any thing else, it must depend upon his free Agency; as we know the very Continuance of the World doth. According to this, it was no more future yesterday that the Sun should rise to day, than it was future that I should write what I now write: yea, tho' God had never so expressly and positively declared that the Sun should rise; for that Declaration would not have destroyed his Power to prevent it, tho' his Word would have been an Obligation upon him not to have exerted that Power. In short then; if "nothing can be future whilst "a free Agent hath in himself a Power to "prevent it;" nothing can ever be said to be future but the Being of God himself. And thus, notwithstanding that solemn Declaration Mr. F. frequently takes notice of, Isa. xiv. 24. *The Lord of hosts hath sworn, surely, as I have thought so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed so shall it stand: we can have no Certainty of any Purpose of God that it shall stand; and it would really be Nonsense to talk of any thing that shall come to pass.* We can say of nothing, except the Being of God, *It will be:* concerning any thing else we must only say, *It may be, It is possible;* for, according to this Notion, it is not, it cannot be future.

Another

Another thing I am concerned for, is the Credit of Revelation, and especially of our blessed Lord and Saviour. I can't but think that any Man, upon reading the sacred Writings, would conclude that God hath there frequently taken upon him *absolutely to foretel* what free Agents would do. This is evidently the first and obvious Appearance of many Predictions: and without a previous persuasion of its being impossible that a free Action should be foreknown, the Predictions refer'd to would, I believe, be universally so understood; as, in fact, they generally have been, agreeable to the common Notion of Mankind concerning God's Foreknowledge of future Events.

As to the Prophecies in general, I am apt to think there will not be found many which do not more or less directly include some free Agency of Men in the Accomplishment: some there are that do expressly and immediately relate to such Actions, declaring before hand what *free Agents will do*. I shall mention but Two under the Old Testament: I mean "Prophecies that were not only conditionally but absolutely certain at the Time of the Prophecy; and yet so depended upon the Behaviour of Men acting freely, that they could not have been accomplished without it." This is what Mr. F. demands (p. 59.)

The first Instance I shall give of a Prophecy that may answer this Description, is in Gen. xv. 13. *God said unto Abraham, Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs; and they shall afflict them four hundred years: and also the nation whom they shall*

shall serve will I judge. Will Mr. F. say, This was conditional? How cou'd a Prophecy be expres'd in a more absolute manner, unless God should say in so many Words, *I tell you this is absolute and not conditional?* Or was not the afflicting *Abraham's Seed*, while they were Strangers in the Land, a wicked thing, and consequently a *free Action?* Let any one read the Account of the *Egyptians* oppressing the *Israelites*, and of God's taking Vengeance upon them for so doing, in the Book of *Exodus*, and then judge. But it is here plainly enough intimated, when God declares, that *The nation whom they should serve he would judge.* And surely it cannot be made a Question, whether this Prophecy so depended upon the Behaviour of the *Egyptians*, that it could not be accomplish'd without it; since this is the very thing foretold in the Prophecy.

The other Instance I shall take notice of, is what *Elisha* declares to *Hazaell*, who came from the King of *Syria* to enquire concerning the King's Recovery, 2 Kings viii. 7, &c. *Elisha* said unto him, *Go say to the King, Thou mayest recover: Howbeit, the Lord hath shewed me that he shall surely die.* Who can doubt, when he reads the following History, but that the Lord then saw what *Hazaell* would treacherously do to murder the King. But farther: *Elisha* settled his countenance, stedfastly looking upon *Hazaell* till he was ashamed: and the Man of God wept. *And Hazaell said, why weepeth my Lord?* And he answered, *Because I know the Evil thou wilt do unto the Children of Israel: their strong Holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child.*

Is there any ground to question, but that these were *free Actions* in *Hazaël*? It's plain he judged them highly criminal; and he seems at that time to have abhorred the thought of committing such Wickedness. *Hazaël* said, *But what! is thy servant a dog that he should do this great thing?* There is no appearance at least of any such *Will or Purpose* then in *Hazaël*, which might make these *Actions necessary*, tho in themselves irregular and criminal, and so to be seen in their necessary *Causes*; as Mr. F. supposes the Case may sometimes be, (v. p. 37.) The Appearance, from the whole Account, is altogether on the other Side. However, there can be no room for any such Pretence in the former Instance; which was a Prophecy given out some hundreds of years before some of the Persons principally concerned in the accomplishing it, had a Being.

I proceed now to some Passages in the New Testament. The crucifying Christ was undoubtedly a wicked *Action*. *Him*, says Peter, *ye have taken, and with wicked hands have crucified and slain*; *Acts ii. 23.* and consequently exhorts them to repent, *v. 38.* I might observe, that in the same Verse where he charges this Guilt upon them, it is declared that Christ was *deliver'd by the determinate Counsel and Foreknowledge of God*.

I shall not collect the Predictions of Christ's Sufferings which are to be found in the Old Testament; much less shall enter into a Debate, whether our Redemption by Christ was only a *provisional*, and not an absolute Determination of God before the Fall. I shall only say, *en passant*, that, in my Opinion, the Phrase

πρὸς οὐταβολῆς κοσμος seems most naturally to be of the same Import with that Expression of our Lord, *John xvii. 5.* πρὸς τὸν κοσμον εἶναι. But the Phrase πρὸς χρονῶν ἀιωνίων, which the Apostle makes use of with relation to the *Promise being given*, hath a Signification very different from the other. And when *Peter* says, *Christ was verily foreordained before the foundation of the world* — I shou'd think that he intends that determinate *Counsel and Foreknowledge of God*, which he speaks of *Acts ii. 23.* that is to say, It was the determinate *Counsel of God* before the *World* was, that we should be redeemed by the *Blood of Christ*, as of a *Lamb*, &c. But I pass this.

But let me observe in general, with relation to the Prophecies concerning Christ in the Old Testament, that both Christ himself, and the Apostles after him do plainly speak of the Sufferings and Death of Christ as Things certainly predicted by the Prophets. What can be plainer than those Words of our Saviour: *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me twelve legions of Angels; but how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?* *Mat. xxvi. 54.* And the Evangelist makes this Remark, *v. 56.* *All this was done, that the Scriptures of the Prophets might be fulfilled.* And see how *Peter* speaks, *Ye have killed the Prince of Life* — *And now, brethren, I wot that through Ignorance ye did it, as did also your Rulers: but these things which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his Prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled,* *Acts iii. 13.* From these, and many other Passages in the New Testament, which you may recollect, it seems very evident that Christ, and his Apostles,

postles, after that they were endu'd with the Spirit, consider'd the Prophecies of the Old Testament, concerning the Death of Christ, as *absolute Predictions*; insomuch that if this had not come to pass, the Scriptures would not have been true. Doth not our Saviour in effect say as much, when he lets *Peter* know, that he could have obtained Deliverance if he would have prayed for it; but this he would not do, because then the Scriptures would not have been fulfilled. *Knowest thou not that I could now pray to my Father*—
But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be? By the way I may observe; If the Death of Christ was absolutely foretold, here was a *certain futurity and foreknowledge of a free Action* of our Blessed Saviour, in giving up himself into their Hands, as well as of the free Agency of his Enemies, in taking him and putting him to Death. Our Lord tells *Peter* expressly, that he could then have obtained Deliverance, (not to mention other Passages which assert most plainly this Truth, and which, I suppose, no Christian makes a Doubt of) here was an Event *certainly future*, and foretold as such, which yet we know was in Christ's *Power to have prevented*.

But I would more especially consider the Declarations of Christ himself with relation to three Particulars. The First is concerning his own *Death* and *Sufferings*: The Second concerning *Peter's denying him*: The Third concerning *Judas's betraying him*. I shall recite some Passages out of the Evangelists; and leave it to you, or any Man to judge, whether Christ did not speak of each of these as certain, and pretend to know them as such be-

fore they came to pass ; and whether they do not stand there as *absolute*, and not only as *conditional* Predictions. I shall endeavour also to make it appear, that the Things foretold, viz. the Crucifying Christ, &c. are represented as *free Actions*, if any Actions of Men are so.

As to the *First* : Several Evangelists mention Christ's foretelling his Death, with many Particulars of the Treatment he should meet with at *Jerusalem*. I shall cite but one Passage. *Mark x. 32.* *He took again the Twelve, and began to tell them what things should happen to him : saying, Behold we go up to Jerusalem ; and the Son of Man shall be delivered to the Chief Priests and to the Scribes, and they shall condemn him to Death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles, and they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him ; and the third day he shall rise again.* In this express manner did our Saviour speak of his Sufferings and Death and Resurrection, again and again ; (not to mention a multitude of other Passages where he plainly refers to his Death and Crucifixion and consequent Resurrection, as things shortly to come to pass, which you can easily recollect.) I suppose I need say no more to prove that the *Act* of the *Jews*, in putting him to Death, &c. was *free* ; since it has been already observed, that the Apostles charge it upon them again and again as their great *Wickedness*. I shall only add, that our Lord plainly supposes this when he prays for their *Forgiveness*. *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*

The Second Instance will be no less plain: I mean the foretelling *Peter's Denial*. Take St. John's Account of this, *Chap. xiii.* *Peter saith unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my Life for thy sake.* Jesus answered him, *Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? amen, amen, I say unto thee, The Cock shall not crow till thou hast denied me thrice.* Would not any Man, upon hearing such a solemn Assertion, say, That Christ pretended to be certain of the Matter. Or will Mr. F. say, that *Peter's Denial* of his Lord was no Sin? Undoubtedly *Peter himself* thought he had sinned grievously, when he *went out and wept bitterly*. And doth not Christ suppose it a Sin, when he says to *Peter*, *I have prayed for thee that thy Faith fail not: and thou, when thou art converted, strengthen thy Brethren.* Or, will it be suggested, that *Peter* had at that time so far habituated himself to such sort of Wickedness, as to have destroyed his Freedom, and to make his denying Christ in those Circumstances a necessary *Action*, *tho irregular and criminal*, (as Mr. F. supposes some Actions may be, *p. 37.*)? Far from it. Who questions but that at this very time, when Christ foretels his Fall, *Peter* had a sincere Zeal for Christ, and meant to do as he said, namely, to lay down his Life for his sake?

Our

N. B. It was some Days before the Passover that Christ spake thus to *Peter*; vid. *the beginning of that 13th Chapter of John.* For tho it may seem by Christ's Expression, *The Cock shall not crow until thou hast denied me*; as if this were spoken that very Night in which Christ suffer'd; yet it is evident this was said to *Peter* immediately after the

Our Lord is as express in foretelling Judas's betraying him ; and at the very same time represents it as a very wicked thing, Mat. xxvi. 21. *αγαγε, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.* Upon the Concern of the Disciples at this general Declaration, and their earnest Enquiry, Which of them it was ; Christ answers, *He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, he it is that shall betray me.* *The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him : but wo to that Man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed ; it had been good for that Man if he had not been born.* Then Judas which betrayed him answered and said,

the Supper, John 13. beg. when Judas was gone out to seek how he might betray him. When therefore Christ says, *The Cock shall not crow* ——— we are to consider those Words as relating to the Time when this Resolution of Peter's shou'd be put to the Trial. “ Wilt thou “ lay down thy Life for my sake ? Verily, I say unto “ thee, that when the Time shall come, that I must go “ where I told thee thou canst not follow me now, and “ thou shalt have an Opportunity of shewing what thou “ wilt do for my sake ; that very Night, instead of lay- “ ing down thy Life for my sake, before the time of “ Cock-crowing, thou wilt deny me thrice.” We are to date this Prediction (if I may so express it) as to the Matter of it, from the Time when it shou'd be put to the Trial whether Peter would then follow Christ or not. So that some Days after this Declaration of Christ, we find Peter persisting in the Resolution of laying down his Life for his Master ; v. Mat. xxvi. 33. And shall we think he dissembled all this while ? We might add (if any thing more were needful to confute such Suspicion) the Words which Christ spake to him, together with the Disciples whom he took into the Garden to watch with him, when he found them asleep ; Matth. xxvi. 40. —— *He saith unto Peter, What, could ye not watch with me one hour ? Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation : the Spirit indeed is willing* ———

Master,

Master, is it I ? He said unto him, Thou hast said. It may not be improper to observe, that Jesus had foretold this before that time here refer'd to. For the Supper mentioned by John, at which our Saviour declared the same thing, and gave a Sign to John, who lay on his Breast, to notify the Person, was some Days before the Passover ; *vid. John xiii.* And Christ spoke thus before Satan enter'd into Judas. So that we have no reason to suppose him under any necessitating Influence when Christ mentioned it, *ver. 21.* *Jesus was troubled in spirit, and testified, saying, αμμι I say to you, that one of you shall betray me.* And when John, upon Peter's beckoning to him, asked who it should be of whom Christ spake ; Jesus answer'd, *He it is to whom I shall give a sop, &c.* What shall we say ? that Christ did not know that Judas would do this, when he spake of it once and again in such a positive manner ? Did he speak only by guess ? The Evangelist says expressly, *He knew who should betray him ; ver. 11.* *therefore, said he, Ye are not all clean.* Yea, and Christ himself says, that he told them this beforehand, that they might be confirm'd in the Belief of his divine Mission : *Now I tell you before it come, that when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am He, ver. 19.* Nay, the same Evangelist tells us, that Jesus knew it long before this : *chap. vi. 64.* *Jesus knew from the beginning, who they were that believed not, and who it was that should betray him.* And it was long before this that Jesus said, *Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil : He spake, says the Evangelist, of Judas Iscariot, στος γαρ ιμελλεν αυτον παραδιδοναι.* I might observe yet farther ; that our Lord himself, and after

after him St. Peter, spake of this Fact as foretold in the Old Testament. Christ in his Prayer for his Apostles, *Io. xvii. 12. Those that thou gavest me I have kept, and have lost none but the Son of Perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.* Doth not this imply that the Scripture would not have been fulfilled if he had not been lost ; and that for this reason Christ was not under the same Obligation to keep him as the rest of the Apostles ? The Words of Peter are, *Act. i. 15. This Scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of David, spake before concerning Judas*— But what I chiefly insist on, are the Predictions of Christ himself. And I must profess, when I read in the Evangelists the things above-mentioned, I can't possibly, in my own Thoughts, clear our Lord from the Charge of having taken upon him *absolutely to foretell the free Actions of Men.*

We might add to the Instances that have been given, his frequent foretelling the *cruel and wicked Treatment* his Disciples should meet with ; (vid. *inter alia, Mat. xxiv.*) as also, the *Revelation which God gave to him to shew to his servants things which must shortly come to pass ; and he sent and signified it by his Angel to his servant John.* Did not John, think you, when he saw those Visions, (and, indeed, doth not every one who reads the Book of the Revelation) look upon them as pretending, at least, to represent those things as *certainly future ?* And shall we not find there a great deal of *Wickedness foretold ?* What think you of all the *Abominations of the Whore of Babylon ?* But the Judgments foretold plainly suppose this.

Mr.

Mr. F. is pleas'd to say, p. 59. " Shew me but one Event which was absolutely sure to be, and yet could not have been without such free Actions of the Creature, which upon the whole might never have been ; " (he must, or ought at least to mean here, *which the Creature had power to have avoided* ; for that is all which Mr. F. can require to the making an Action free) " and I own myself confuted." I know not whether Mr. F. will allow any of those Events above-mentioned to be of that Number : Good Wits may find out Evasions which I could never think of. I can only say, to me they appear evidently to be such : and can't help thinking, as I said before, that any indifferent Person would conclude, from the Passages recited ; that the Prophets of old, and especially our blessed Lord, did pretend at least, *absolutely to foretel what free Agents would do*. And if, after all, there can be no such thing in Nature as the *certain Futurity* of a free Action ; I can't but be under some Concern for the Credit of the sacred Writings, and in particular for the Character of our Saviour. Let us see therefore if we cannot clear this Point from the Contradiction which Mr. F. would fasten upon it. I am not without hopes that this may be done by a clear stating the Terms we make use of, and keeping close to the Ideas we affix to them.

I begin first with the Notion of a *Contradiction*. This always hath reference to two Assertions or Suppositions, the one of which destroys the other.

By a *free Action*, I understand an Action done by an intelligent Being ; who had, at the time of doing it, a Power in himself to do it or to forbear doing it. I think this is agreeable to Mr. F's Notion of Freedom.

As to the Word *Future* ; I have as clear a Notion of what is meant by it, as I have of what is meant by the Word *Present*, or as what is meant by the Word *Past* ; all which need not, or indeed will scarce bear any Explication. I wou'd only observe ; that all these Terms relate only to the Existence of a Thing, or some Fact or Event, entirely abstracted from any reference to the Cause or Manner of its coming to pass. The Notion of *present*, or *past*, or *future*, is just the same, whether the Term be used concerning an Event suppos'd to be the Effect of a necessary Cause, or concerning a free Action. When I say, The Sun rose six Hours ago ; The Sun will set six Hours hence ; The Sun shines now ; God created the World six thousand Years ago ; God upholds the World now ; God will destroy the World six thousand Years hence ; God hath promised to give eternal Life to them that obey him ; God will make good his Promise : In all these, and like Cases, the Notions of *past*, *present*, and *future*, are the same, and relate only to the *Event* or *Fact* ; and are equally intelligible, whether the Event be from a necessary Cause, or a free Agent. I understand as well what I say, when I say *God will keep his promise*, as when I say *God will exist for ever* : I understand as well what I say, when I say, *Christ will come to Judgment*, as when I say, *Christ did come into this World*— And, no doubt, the

the Disciples understood as well the Words of Christ, when he said, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you will betray me*, as they did afterwards, and we do now understand this Proposition, *Judas did betray Christ*.

Now as the Ideas of *past, present, and future*, are as clear and distinct as any Ideas we have ; it is evident that, with respect to each of them, we may form the like contradictory Propositions : This is present, This is not present ; The Sun shines, The Sun doth not shine ; I am writing, I am not writing ; Such a thing was done yesterday, That thing was not done yesterday ; The Sun did shine two Hours ago, The Sun did not shine two Hours ago ; I did write yesterday, I did not write yesterday ; Such a thing will come to pass, That thing will not come to pass ; The Sun will rise to morrow morning, The Sun will not rise to morrow morning ; God will destroy the World to morrow, God will not destroy the World to morrow. Will any one say that the Contradiction in the last Instances, which relate to *Futurity*, is not as manifest as in the Instances relating to the two other Cases, namely, of things *past or present* ?

I add : it is no less evident that in all the Cases both contradictory Propositions cannot be true ; and that one must be true, the other false. Is this evident with reference to things *past* ? it is no less so with reference to *future*. e. g. Is it true that Christ was crucified ? it must then be false to say, That Christ was not crucified. In like manner, if I say, God will destroy the World to morrow ;

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and you say, God will not destroy the World to morrow ; we cannot both be right : what one says, is a *Truth* ; what the other says, is *false*. Nor doth the Truth or Falshood of the Propositions which relate to things *future* at all depend upon our Knowledge of the Event, any more than the Truth or Falshood of the Propositions which relate to things *past*. Should I say, You were at *London* yesterday ; and another say, You were not at *London* yesterday ; both could not say the Truth : the one Assertion would be a *Truth*, the other a *Falshood* ; tho neither He nor I should know which was true or which was false, till you, or some other Person, shou'd inform us. We know from the Propositions themselves being contradictory, that both cannot be true ; that one must be true and the other false. And it is exactly the same with respect to things *future*.

I have been more prolix than perhaps was needful : but I was willing to make this one Point clear ; that any one might, as it were, feel within himself that he hath as clear a Notion of a Thing's *being future*, without any manner of respect to the Cause bringing the Event to pass, as he hath of a Thing's *being past* ; yea, as clear a Notion of *Futurity*, when applied to a *free Action*, as he hath of a *free Action's being past*. He understands himself as well, when he says, *God will* some time hereafter destroy this World ; as he doth when he says, *God did* some time ago create this World : And this Proposition, *God will reward the Righteous*, is full as intelligible as the following Proposition, *God will exist for ever, or, The divine Being will continue for ever*.

But

But you will say, perhaps, What have you got by all this ? when the Difficulty urg'd by Mr. F. still remains ; viz. *That the Supposition of certain Futurity infers Necessity, and consequently destroys Freedom.* Of this presently. I wou'd only observe, in the mean time, that we have got thus much, if what we have insisted on be admitted : It appears that we have a clear Notion of a free Action's *being future* ; yea, and that every free Action that comes to pass in time, was *once future* ; that before it came to pass, those two Propositions concerning it, *It will be*, *It will not be*, were contradictory Propositions, the one of which was *true*, the other *false* ; just in the same manner, and with the same Evidence, as the two Propositions, *It was so*, *It was not so*, are contradictory, and the one *true*, the other *false*, after that the thing is past.

But to come to the Point. It's said, The certain Futurity of an Action infers a *Necessity* of it, or makes it necessary. How so ? When it's said, Such a one will use his Power so ; doth that deny his Power ? The very Proposition supposes and asserts his Power : the Proposition, I say, supposes the Agent to have the Power of doing or not doing ; and asserts only, that *he will use that Power* in such a manner, this way and not that way.

But it's said : If this be a true Proposition, " *That a Man will do so ; then it is impossible he should not do so : What will be, must be.*" Or on the other hand, " *If a Person may, and knows he may forbear what he certainly will do ;*

do ; this is in effect to say, that he may, and certainly knows that he may, make an immutable Truth false, and an immutable Falshood true ; *i. e.* do Impossibilities, work Contradictions, do that which cannot possibly be done." p. 87. But here let us take in the true Notion of Contradiction. *That*, as we observ'd, always implies two Assertions or Suppositions, the one of which destroys the other. Now to say, or suppose, that an Action *will be* done, and to say, or suppose, that the said Action *will not* be done, is indeed a Contradiction : In like manner to say, a Person *will*, at such a time, have power to do such a thing ; and to say, he *will not*, at that time, have power to do it, is a Contradiction. But what Contradiction is there in saying, A Person will do so at such a time, tho at that very time he shall have power to do otherwise ? or what Contradiction is there in saying, Such an Event will happen, tho a certain Person will have it in his power to prevent it ? Who doth not see, that both are perfectly consistent, and both may be true ?

And whereas it's said, " That if the one be suppos'd true, namely, that he *will do* such a thing, the contrary is impossible ; *i. e.* it is impossible he should not do it :" the Fallacy lies in the Application (if I may so express it) of the Word *impossible* ; which doth not at all relate to the *Power of the Agent*, but to another Point, which is perfectly consistent with such Power in the Agent. *i. e.* 'Tis *impossible that the contrary Supposition concerning the Fact or Event should be true* : a logical kind of Impossibility ; which hath no more Influence to the depriving an Agent of the physical Power of acting or not

not acting, which he is possess'd of in himself, than the Impossibility of the Non-existence of a Man in the *Indies*, when he doth actually exist there, can take away my power of acting or not acting. This, I think, may plainly appear, by putting in the very Terms of the Person's *having such a Power* into the two Propositions. As thus: It is certain that Mr. F. will write again upon this Subject, tho he will have power to forbear writing. This being supposed; it is a Contradiction to suppose that he will not write, tho he have the power to forbear writing. From this Contradiction arises the Impossibility we are speaking of. But what is that Impossibility? Is it an Impossibility of his having in himself the Power to forbear writing? No surely; this was supposed in the Proposition: but an Impossibility of the contrary Proposition's being true; namely, That he will not use the Power of writing, which he hath; an Impossibility, I say, of this latter Proposition's being true, the other contrary Proposition being before supposed true. It is granted therefore; that when a thing is supposed to be certainly future, it is a Contradiction to suppose that it should be *actually prevented*; and in this respect we may say, it is *impossible* it should be prevented: but it is no Contradiction at all to suppose, that a Person should have in himself *a Power* to prevent, what it is infallibly certain he will not prevent. And I can grant, that "if all the Villanies in the World were certainly fore-known; *actually to have prevented* any of them, would have been to have proved Infallibility fallible." (Pref p. 6.) For this doth not hinder but that the guilty Persons might have in themselves a Power to have prevented what it was

was infallibly certain they would not use their Power to prevent. In this there is no manner of Contradiction.

But says Mr. F. " A Power that can't be exerted without making a Contradiction true, is no Power; or is a Power to do Impossibilities: But a Power to prevent what's certain, is a Power to make what's certain not certain: Now for a thing to be certain and not certain, is a flat Contradiction." (p. 28.) The foregoing Considerations may relieve us under the Weight of this formidable Argument. For let it be remember'd, as was said before, that the Contradiction lies in the two contrary Suppositions concerning the *Fact* or *Event*. As thus: It is supposed certain, that such an Action will be done at such a time: to suppose it not done at such a time, is indeed a Contradiction to the former Supposition. But then, put the Case the Action be not done: this doth not make a Contradiction true, but really makes the former Supposition false. And tho 'tis granted, that the *actual making* what's certain not certain, is a Contradiction; yet there is no Contradiction in supposing, that a Person may *have a Power* to do that, which, if done, would make a former Prediction false; when at the same time it is *supposed certain*, that he will not so use his Power.

In like manner: when it is said, " A Power of not doing what it is certain we shall do, is a Power to do Impossibilities; because it is impossible that that which is certain should not be done;" it is to be consider'd, that the Impossibility here spoken of doth not at all relate to the Power

Power inherent in the Agent, as if it was asserted that he hath a Power to do what is beyond the reach of his Power; (as for Instance, a Power to fly in the Air, when he hath no Wings to fly with; or the like:) but the Impossibility relates to the Inconsistency of two opposite Suppositions concerning the Event. It is impossible that both should be true; and, supposing the one to be true, the other cannot be true: but there is no Impossibility in conceiving that a Person should *have a Power of not doing* a thing, tho it be known that he will not use that Power. In short; tho it is impossible that a thing should be certain and not certain, it is not impossible that a Person should have in himself a Power of forbearing to do what it is certain he will do. This, I think, any one may easily conceive.

And therefore, when Mr. F. demands; "Those who pretend to such Power, let them *actually prevent* what's certain, and we'll believe they can:" this, however at first hearing it may seem very smart and pungent, is altogether besides the purpose; and, if it might not be reckon'd an Incivility to your Friend, I should venture to say, will appear upon due Consideration to be a ridiculous Proposal. As if there could not be a Power when it is not exercised; whereas this must be Fact in every free Action. It cannot be said to be free, according to Mr. F's Notion of Freedom, (if I take him right) if a Person have not a Power of not doing a thing at the same time that he does it. And I might with as good reason say to Mr. F. "Those who say a Man hath the Power of acting or not acting, let them once give an Instance of a Man's not doing what

he actually doth, and we will believe that he had the Power of not doing what he did." For the *not actual* preventing what it's supposed certain he will not prevent, is no more a Proof of his not having a physical Power of preventing it, than a Man's not forbearing to do what he actually doth, is a Proof that he hath not in himself a Power to forbear.

I

Let it be observed, for the farther clearing this Matter : The *Necessity* we speak of, when it's said, *What is certain must be*, or the *Impossibility* of a thing's not coming to pass when it is supposed certain that it will be ; these are not, cannot be, antecedent to the Action, as real Causes of the Action ; but are indeed merely Consequences upon the Action's being consider'd as certainly future. That is to say, The Agent doth not do what he doth because it was certain that he would do so, and therefore must do so : but, on the contrary, because he would use his Power of acting in this Way, and not in another, therefore this Action was future ; and being so, *i. e.* certainly future, it was impossible it should not be future : whereas, if the Person would have acted otherwise, which he might have done if he would ; then that other Action, instead of what is now certain, would have been certain ; and it would have been in the same manner impossible that that should not have been. Hence it is evident, that whatever we may say *ex hypothesis*, of the *Necessity* of a free Action's coming to pass ; this *Necessity* (or *Impossibility* of its not coming to pass) doth not lay any manner of Restraint upon the Power of the Agent, but is only a Result from the Supposition, *That he will use his Power in this way, and not in that.* I have it now in my Power to go to *London* or not to go to *London* : if I make use of this Power in going to *London*, will any one say, I was under Constraint, was necessitated to go, because it was certain yesterday that I should use my Power this way, and not the other ? or do I lose my Power of resolving to stay at home, because, upon the Supposition of its being certain yesterday that I would go, it was impossible it should be true that

I

I shall illustrate the Matter before us by a Denunciation pronounced by our Saviour ; where he expresses, in the strongest Terms, the *Certainty of the Event*, and, if you will, an *Impossibility that it should be otherwise* ; and yet plainly supposes, in the Persons who do the things, a *Power to have done otherwise*. *Wo to the World because of Offences*, *αναγνη γαρ εσιν ελθειν τα σκανδαλα*, Mat. xviii. 7. or, as Luke hath it, *ανειδειτον εσι μη ελθειν*.—— yet he adds, *Wo to that Man by whom the Offence cometh* : which surely our Saviour would never have added, if he had not known at the same time that it would be in the Power of the Man, by whom the Offence cometh, to have avoided it.

When it is said, that *The Word and Oath of God are two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie*; what is this Impossibility ? Doth God's giving his Word and Oath take away from him, destroy, and annihilate the physical Power he had before, of saying or doing, that which would be contrary to what he hath now declared ? If so ; what Thanks for keeping his Word when he cannot help it ? Must we make the divine *Nature mutable* (for so it is, if he loses the natural Power he once had) in order to make his Word *immutable* ? Is there no way of establishing his moral Perfection without destroying his na-

I would not go ? This I take to be the whole of the Matter : And what is there in this inconsistent with Freedom ?

tural Perfection ? but the Mischief is, that this would destroy the moral Perfection too. How is it then said to be *impossible that God should lie* ? Not surely for want of a *natural Power* in God to say or do the thing which would be contrary to his Word and Oath : doubtless that Power is the same it ever was ; and without this, Faithfulness would be no Virtue. But whereas it is inconsistent with Faithfulness for one to go back from his Word, and this Virtue belongs to God in the most perfect degree ; it may therefore be said, 'Tis impossible for God to lye, *i. e.* 'tis impossible, and a Contradiction, that the most perfect Faithfulness should be unfaithful. Mr. F. may, if he pleases, call such a Power in God, *a Power to make a Contradiction true* ; *a Power to do Impossibilities* : yet it is such a Power as he must allow in fact, unless he will deny Faithfulness in God to be a moral Perfection, and his fulfilling his Promise to be a free Action. On the other hand, if God be allowed to be a free Agent in keeping his Word, we have here an undeniable Instance of a *Power* (*a physical Power*) of forbearing to do that which it is certain will be done, or of doing that which it is certain will not be done ; *i. e.* in Mr. F's Phrase, *a Power to prevent what is certainly future* ; and that when the *actual preventing* it would be a Contradiction to a known Truth. This is all we want in establishing the certain Futurity of a free Action.

And now, if the certain Futurity of free Actions doth not involve a Contradiction, I think myself obliged to ascribe to the most perfect Being the Foreknowledge of them. For to me it

it appears evidently a greater Perfection to know all things at once, than to have his Knowledge perpetually increasing as things come to pass, and to be at an Uncertainty and in Suspence till he sees what the Creature will do; to be forming the noblest and most important Schemes *provisionally*, for Occasions which, for aught he knows, may never happen, &c. And when, moreover, I find the sacred Writings speaking so plainly of several Predictions of free Actions, and of the actual Accomplishment of such Predictions; if there be no Contradiction in the Supposition, there is no room to question the Fact.

Nor do I see that the Goodness of God will gain much by denying his Prescience. The Objections against that would have much the same Force upon his not interposing in the time of imminent Danger, which we cannot but suppose the All-seeing One must, in many Cases, be apprehensive of, time enough to prevent the Evil; tho we shou'd suppose he were not absolutely certain what the Creature would do.

If what I have offer'd be sufficient to vindicate the Possibility of God's foreknowing the free Actions of Men, and the Scriptures do assert the Fact; there remains only the Difficulty, *How God doth foresee what a free Agent will do.* But Mr. F. will not insist on this.

As to myself, tho I think it altogether unreasonable for any Man to require my believing a thing while it appears to me to involve a Contradiction; I make no Difficulty of believing

lieving many things, when yet I can't pretend to explain the manner— This I leave to others, being ready to receive Light, if it may be offer'd ; or if not, am content to be ignorant.

I hope, Sir, you will not reckon it Conceitedness in me to say, that I am clear in my own Mind, as to the Point I have undertaken to defend ; *viz.* the certain Futurity of free Actions, and, consequently, a Possibility of their being foreknown. If I could not have satisfy'd myself in the Argument, I should not have presumed to have offer'd my Thoughts upon the Subject. But if I shall find that what I have said satisfies you also ; it will give me the double Pleasure, of having your Approbation, and of being farther confirm'd in my own Judgment.

I am, &c.

F I N I S.